



**PUBLIC CITIZENS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**  
**Statement by Colleen McCauley, Health Policy Director, PCCY**  
**(and parent of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student at Penn Alexander)**  
**School District of Philadelphia**  
**Student Reform Commission (SRC)**  
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Members of the School Reform Commission, good evening. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you tonight about helping to keep school children healthy. My name is Colleen McCauley and I am the Health Policy Director at Public Citizens for Children Youth, the lead child advocacy and policy organization for children in southeastern Pennsylvania. I am also the proud parent of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student at the Penn Alexander School. And I have been a registered nurse for the past 21 years.

I know the District is grappling with an enormous budget deficit. I very much appreciate that day in and day out you are faced with very difficult funding decisions. As you well know, PCCY and many other organizations in the city and across the state have been working at all levels of government to advocate for fair and equitable school funding, and we remain steadfast in these efforts. As you continue to deal with this terrible budget situation, children who are part of your responsibility during a major part of their day need to be assured of decent access to school health services.

The health-related needs of students today are not the same as they were 30 plus years ago when many of us adults in this room were in school. Aside from the usual childhood maladies, students today have chronic conditions that have become much more prevalent like asthma, diabetes and allergies (that require inhalers, insulin and EpiPens, respectively). Drug abuse, behavioral issues (hyperactivity and autism, for example), seizure disorders and mental health problems requiring higher levels of care are common too.

And with one quarter of children living in single-family homes and women comprising half of the nation's workforce, children today are kept home from school due to a possible illness far less than they used to be. They are sent to school so their parents can go to work knowing there is a school nurse to rely on in case they need to. Additionally, today's children bring more personal problems to school, are more likely to be impoverished and have less parental and community support.

Back in the day, public education for special kids with special needs was virtually non-existent. Thanks to the 1970s-era Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, special ed has evolved such that children with all manner of physical and mental conditions are mainstreamed into the classroom.

The school nurse contributes to the school team by developing the plan in the IEP, protecting and maintaining safety and health needs and training staff on assisting a returning student who, for example, has suffered a traumatic brain injury.

Further, the role of the school nurse and school health services has expanded to include educating students and parents about health maintenance, disease prevention, how to use the health care system and how to obtain insurance.

Regarding insurance, there is at this very moment a profound threat to children's access to public health insurance. In the last four months, 88,000 children statewide have lost their Medical Assistance coverage; 25,000 of these children live in Philadelphia, and it's likely that the majority of them attend District schools. PCCY and other advocacy groups are working tirelessly to stop the hemorrhaging of children off Medical Assistance. We work with the school nurses to help children access insurance and health care.

PCCY has partnered with the District and school nurses and counselors on a number of health-related efforts for nearly two decades. We are very familiar with their student's physical and behavioral health needs and their experiences delivering these services. We work with school nurses to provide thousand of children dental care and vision care to kids annually. Nurses screen these children and help us reach out to those who need follow up care so together we can make kids ultimately get what they need.

School nurses and counselors are PCCY's number one referral source to connect parents to our health insurance helpline where we help hundreds of parents every year complete a health insurance application – over the phone, for free and in any language.

The public and parochial school children rely on the care that school nurses provide.

All this is to say that I am and PCCY is very familiar with the health needs of students in the District – and their health needs are varied, sometimes complex and inextricably linked to their academic and behavioral performance in school.

As you continue to make difficult decisions about how best to meet the needs of students while simultaneously dealing with a terrible budget situation, I urge you to ensure that your students have access to appropriate school- based health services administered by staff qualified to render this care.

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